The Berrien County Historical Association

The Docket

The History Center at Courthouse Square

March 2020 | Volume 36, Issue 3

BCHA Events - March

March 8
Exhibit Opening: A Cup of Sugar and Creative Kids 2020, 2:30 p.m.
Sheriff's Residence, Free admission
Two temporary exhibits are opening in March at the Sheriff's Residence. The first is our new A Community Curated exhibit, A Cup of Sugar and the second is our Herald Palladium Creative Kids entries. This exhibit opening is for BCHA members, exhibit partners, and special invitees only.

March 9 - 22
A Community Curated: A Cup of Sugar
Sheriff's Residence
Food brings us together and plays an important role in our cultural identity. Residence, businesses, and NPOs throughout Berrien County have come together to tell the story of our shared food heritage.

March 9 - 22
Through The Eyes of a Child: Creative Kids 2020
Sheriff's Residence
Every year, the Herald Palladium invites students across Berrien County to create advertisements for area businesses and NPOs. Mrs. Lear's 3rd Grade class from Brown Elementary (St. Joe) was assigned to us and we're excited to share these great pieces of art with the public!

March 12
***TNC Talk*: Americans and Meat: How and Why What We'd Decided to Eat, 6:30 p.m.**
1839 Courthouse, Free admission
Dr. Wilson Warren from Western Michigan University will be our March TNC speaker, where

And Now a Word from the Director

Ever tried. Ever failed. No Matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

Samuel Beckett

My dear friends,

I am in the middle of a binge rewatch of *Criminal Minds* on Netflix. And in the first episode, Gideon says the quotation above. It resonated with me because I think I had my first "fail" as the BCHA's director.

There is a new trend in museums that gives the public a chance to curate their own stories through a set exhibi. Given there is only so much space for the stories we can carry and given how many stories are out there in other museums and homes, I wanted to create something like that here.

So the A Community Curated series and *A Cup of Sugar* were born and I was really excited, y'all. What a great chance for people who love to tell stories to be in a museum telling stories. Everyone is going to love this, right?!

Ever tried.

Except I had no response to my initial inquiries, despite running ads in *The Journal Era* and sending out press releases. I was able to make connections with some of our community partners such as Shuler Dairy Farm. But the big grand exhibit I had planned has shrunk to what is likely only enough artifacts for one room.

Ever failed.

he will explore meat-eating and its role in American food culture. He'll also explore how groups like Seventh Day Adventist play a role in shaping food traditions with regards to diet.

March 22
Meriendas on the Courthouse: The Music of the Philippines, 2:30 p.m.
1839 Courthouse, $5 public, $2 members
Our new Merienda series explores the heritage of the world through music and this month we explore the world of Filipino music. With roots in indigenous traditions and influenced by colonizing forces, the unique sounds of the Philippines comes to the states.

Partner Events - March

March 20
Berrien County Genealogical Society
Spring Genealogy Lock-in
Maud Preston Palenske Memorial Library
St. Joseph
The BCGS is hosting is spring after-hours genealogical research session. Assistance will be available by members of the BCGS and refreshments will be served. To learn more, please call 269-983-7167 to register.

March 28
Kalamazoo Valley Genealogical Society
Annual Allen Cty Library Bus Trip
$35.00 per person, not including meals
The KVGS once again is hosting their annual trip to the Allen County Public Library trip to use their genealogy room. The bus leaves from three locations and the trip will be the whole day. To learn more and to sign up, please visit their website at mikvgs.org.

But, I was mentored by a brilliant director in the early years of my career who always told me, "Rhi, if you can't paint red, then paint blue." In other words, find a different path to your solution.

No matter.

So, with likely a room and a hallway now available to me, I'll be putting on display our Herald Palladium Creative Kids entries that came to us in February. We get to display the awesome work of these kids and they get a chance to see that work in a museum, something they probably never thought would happen to them.

And we're gonna have a party to celebrate both. Because that's what we do here at the BCHA - we celebrate history, memory, heritage, traditions, and culture.

Try again.

This isn't the end of the A Community Curated series and we're going to try again in September with a Back to School theme. Elementary, middle, high, college, university - doesn't matter, we want your school stories.

Will I fail again? It's unsure, but I know I'll fail better if I do. Because there is no place to go but up, right?

Historically yours,

A Curated Corner: A Curious Case of the People v. John Williams

By Sandra Spiering, Curator

This month we're bringing a different approach to our curator's corner. We are sharing the following story from our collections and research. Warning, some of this story may be a bit disturbing to some readers.

John Williams (center) sits on Ferry Street in Berrien Springs. No other

Working in the archives here at BCHA can usually be a bit mundane. However, ever so often the job takes a

photos of John appear in our collections.

surprising turn. Recently I came across an interesting photograph, one taken over a hundred years ago. In the photo, a group of men and children are gathered around a horse and wagon parked outside the post office in Berrien Springs.

Sitting atop the wagon is an African-American man sporting a white beard. With his arms folded over his legs and a cap perched upon his head, he stares directly into the camera. According to an article in *The Journal Era*, the photo was taken in August of 1889 and the man's name is John Williams.

My interest in him was piqued, so I began to do some research. What I eventually discovered was a whodunit mystery involving John Williams and members of the Benton Harbor community. Whether this is the same John Williams from the aforementioned photograph, however, is still unknown.

On Tuesday, September 20, 1898, after a day of shopping in town, an African-American woman named Mrs. Solonus Shoemaker headed back to her home in Benton Harbor. At 8:30pm, as she turned the corner on Broadway, she noticed a man walking behind her. She recognized him as John Williams. Coming alongside her, John tipped his hat and said good evening. After she responded back, he made an obscene demand.

Mrs. Shoemaker indignantly turned him down, after which he attacked her, throwing her to the ground and pulling up her skirts. When she threatened to yell for help, John pulled out a revolver and shot her four times: twice in the left cheek, once in the left ear, and once in her side, the bullet ricocheting off of her steel corset. He then shot himself in the side and fled the scene. Amazingly Mrs. Shoemaker survived the attack and dragged herself to a nearby home to call for help.

When the police found John Williams in his bed the next morning, he told an entirely different story. He claimed he was innocent of the crime and explained that Mrs. Shoemaker owed him money from an earlier loan. When he tried to collect it from her the previous evening, the man she was with pulled out a revolver and shot him. Not believing his story, the police arrested him.

During the highly publicized trial two months later, his attorney, A.L. Hammond, elaborated further on John's claims. He stated that Mrs. Shoemaker had been cheating on her husband and going out with other men, angering her husband. And it was her husband, Mr. 'Boney' Shoemaker, who had shot his wife and John Williams that evening. A.L. Hammond even called a Justice of the Peace to the stand who testified that Boney knew his wife was running around with other men and had previously talked to him about getting her arrested.

Additional witnesses were introduced to prove that Mr. and Mrs. Shoemaker's marriage was an unhappy one and even though Boney testified he did not own a

revolver, he previously told the Chief of Police he did and even showed it to one of the officers. However, Williams' story was just a little too far-fetched for the jurors, and on December 1, 1898 he was found guilty and sentenced to a term of four years in the Ionia prison.

And this is where the story ends. Additional research turned up no more information on John Williams and I was not able to determine if the man in the photograph was the same one who went to prison for the attempted murder of Mrs. Shoemaker. However, this fascinating story illustrates what I believe, that history isn't boring, but yet is full of riveting stories that connect us to the past and highlight the human experience.

Into the Collection Vaults: The Day the Earth Shook

Sometimes the history in our vaults isn't always local history - sometimes it's national with far reaching implications even in our own corner of the world. These four photos are part of a larger album recording the April 1906 San Francisco earthquake. It is unsure if the photographer was a relative of the donor or how these first-hand photos arrived in Berrien County, but these are a unique look into this historic event right from our own vaults.

Photo of one of the many tent cities set up around the city to house residents. In many of these cities, residents who had previously lived in segregated parts of town mingled together to access resources.

This tent city in Golden Gate Park is probably one of the more well known. The mild weather of the city made tent dwelling more bearable.

The destruction around the city was enormous with some 80% of buildings and home destroyed by the earthquake, its aftershocks, and the resulting fires. Approximately 3,000 people were declared dead.

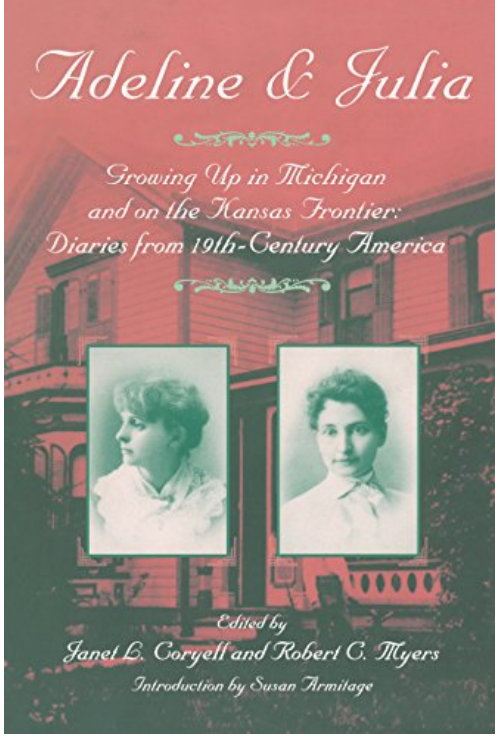
A look at the destruction as seen in Chinatown. While at the time only 375 deaths were ultimately reported, hundreds of deaths in Chinatown went unreported and historians have worked towards the 3,000 total estimated today.

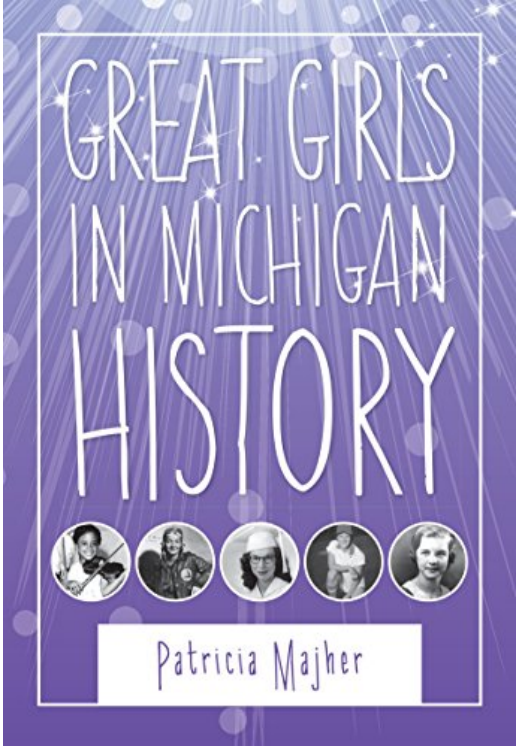
On the Docket Books & Gifts: Who Run the World?

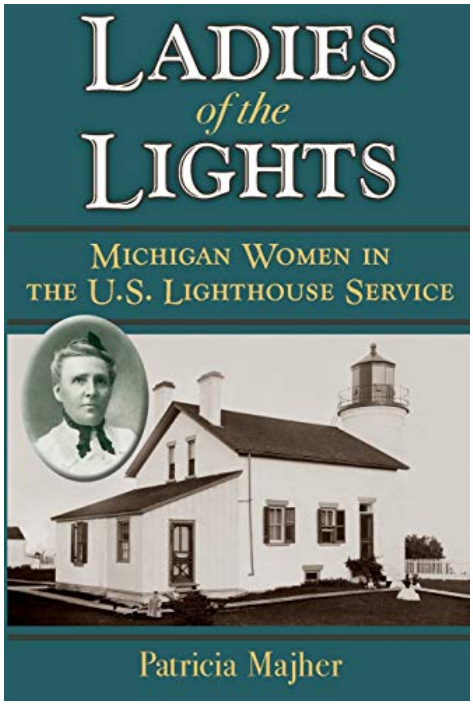
by Tara Velez, Museum Operations Coordinator

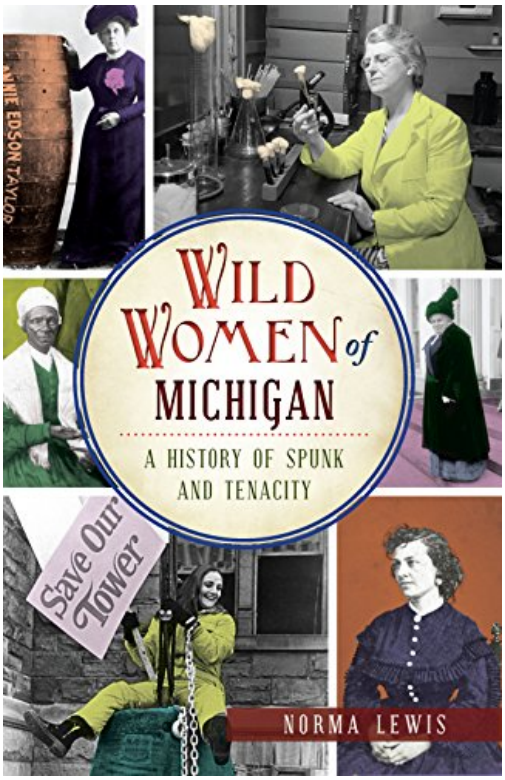
If you're a Beyonce fan, you know the exact answer to that question. But just for the record it's girls and this month we are celebrating the power of girls and women for Women's History month. We're excited to carry books that don't just celebrate women, but specifically celebrate women in Michigan who shaped our state regardless if they were bold and brash or worked quietly behind the scenes.

And with St. Patrick's Day around the corner, we have some great new shamrock themed items in our gift shop (which does double duty for our friends in Berrien Springs!)


Adeline & Julia
Growing Up in Michigan and on the Kansas Frontier: Diaries from 19th-Century America
Edited by
Janet L. Coryell and Robert C. Myers
Introduction by Susan Armitage





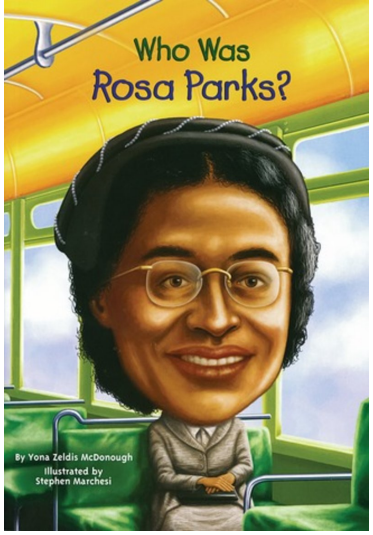


TOP: Adeline & Julia: Growing up in Michigan and on the Kansas Frontier: Diaries from 19th Century America

BOTTOM: Ladies of the Lights: Michigan Women in the U.S. Lighthouse Service

TOP: Great Girls in Michigan History

BOTTOM: Wild Women of Michigan: A History of Spunk and Tenacity



FOR KIDS: The Who Was series titles:

Rosa Parks
Susan B. Anthony
Sojourner Truth
Rachel Carlson
Laura Ingalls Wilder
Aretha Frankli

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FOR ST. PAT'S DAY: Shamrock themed buttons, temporary tattoos, and stuffies.

Friends and Partners

Thank you to our partners for making this month's programs and exhibits a reality!

SHULER Dairy Farms

Niles History Center & Fort St. Joseph Museum

WATERFRONT framing & fine art

hp The Herald-Palladium

St. Joseph PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Tara Velez, Museum Operations Coordinator
Lori Fedore, Complex Caretaker

Our Mission Statement

The Mission of the BCHA is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of Berrien County through exhibits, tours, publications, and educational and community outreach programs for public benefit.

About the Berrien County Historical Association

The History Center at Courthouse Square is operated by the Berrien County Historical Association and is located in Berrien Springs, MI. Since 1967, the BCHA has operated the five buildings located on Courthouse Square, including the 1839 Courthouse, an 1830s log cabin, a recreated blacksmith forge, an 1870s sheriff's residence, and the 1860s county records building. For more information about our exhibits and programs, contact the BCHA at 269-471-1202. Find us ***online***, on ***Facebook***, and on ***Instagram***.